

# MYSTERY LIONS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

By Rex Gilroy

**DOES AUSTRALIA HARBOUR A  
YET 'UNDISCOVERED' SPECIES  
OF MOUNTAIN LION?**

**OFF ALL THE STRANGE  
CREATURES REPORTED, -  
SIGHTINGS OF LARGE CAT LIKE  
CREATURES ARE THE MOST  
PERSISTENT AND ONE OF THE  
MOST PUZZLING.**

Rex Gilroy welcomes any helpful information on these, or any other mystery Australian animals to assist his research. He can be contacted by phone on (067) 78 7201, or by writing to him at PO Box 473, Kootingal, NSW 2352.

One night in 1975, eerie roaring sounds and the frantic cries of stock, awoke the family from sleep on their isolated Kanimbla Valley farm. The farmer looked at his alarm clock. The time was 3am.

The horses, cattle and fowls were obviously disturbed by something, and the family's two cattle dogs, kept in the house that night, were already barking furiously to get out the back door.

The farmer, thinking dingos were attacking his fowls, let the dogs out whilst at the same time, grabbing his rifle and torch.

As his wife and children looked on, the pyjama-clad farmer flashed his torch about the back yard pens and stables, but saw nothing. The dogs however, appeared to be pursuing something up in the nearby mountain scrub. They returned later that day, one of them seriously wounded by what appeared to be a large scratch.

Nothing more could be done in the darkness, so the family all retired to an uneasy sleep.

At first light however, the farmer dressed and went to inspect the stock. Up in a nearby paddock he found one of his cows - dead and horribly mutilated, - a few dead sheep also torn up - and large paw prints in nearby soil.

What had killed the animals? Neighbouring property owners were called to inspect the dead stock and fresh tracks. They were convinced that one of the notorious mystery "Blue Mountains' Lions" was once again on the prowl in the area.

The remote vastness of the rugged Blue Mountains, west of Sydney has always been a land of mystery, since long before the first white men ever set foot there.

For here dwelt the hairy man-beast, the Yowie, the equally terrifying "Jogungs", a race of giant-size man-like beings who wandered the mountains killing and eating Aborigines with their big stone clubs; as well as a whole menagerie of other "bunyips".

Yet of all the mystery creatures that haunt the Blue Mountains (other than the Yowies and Jogungs), none were more certain to strike terror in people's minds than the large, ferocious, hairy, lion-like animals, claimed to be roaming the remote valleys and forests.

Called 'rock dogs' or 'Warrigals' by the former Blue Mountains Aboriginal tribes, the monsters were described as being from 2 to 2.3m in length and around 1m tall when stand-

ing on all fours.

They were invariably described as having from light to dark brown fur, with a large cat-like head and a long, shaggy mane. Large shearing teeth protruded from their powerful jaws.

Nick-named the "Blue Mountains Lion" by early settlers, they were the terror of lonely farming communities scattered across the Burratorang, Megalong and Kanimbla valleys, extending north to Lithgow and west beyond the vast Jenolan/Kanangra region.

Stories of these mystery 'lions' are still the subject of campfire tales on dark Blue Mountains valley nights, for there are many people who, even today, have claimed encounters with the beasts. Many more still have found large cat-like pad marks in the ground.

News reports of an approximate 2m long 'lion-like' animal, seen by a party of loggers in mid-1979 on a lonely bushland track high up on the Atherton Tableland above Cairns prompted a number of Blue Mountains residents to come forward with stories of their own.

During 1988, such an animal was sighted by campers near Hampton, west of Katoomba, the location of some bad cattle mutilations on remote properties.

Until a decline in the number of reported sightings on the lower Blue Mountains after 1955, the first half of the 1950's was a very active period for these animals. Campers and bushwalkers made frequent reports of encounters, and there were many cattle mutilations, over an area extending from the Kings Tableland of Wentworth Falls, eastward down to the Lapstone escarpment. It was a time of considerable panic among the locals.

During 1953, a group of army officers and men undertook a cross-country march from Ingleburn Army Camp to Katoomba, during which they kept a lookout for a 'lion-like' beast which about that time had been reported as seen prowling at night through bushland between the towns of Warragamba and Katoomba.

Loggers working near Mount Harris, 15 miles from Katoomba informed the soldiers that the beast was covered with long shaggy hair and that it was about the size of a lion. They had named it the Erskine Gap Monster. Large paw prints were found in the Mount Harris - Erskine Gap region. (They still are found today!)

In October 1955, Blue Mountains residents spent considerable man-hours 'lion-hunting'. Large parties of locals together with police searched extensive areas of bushland between Wentworth Falls and the Blaxland-Glenbrook area, in search of a large shaggy-haired lion-like animal which had been causing concern.

In the Sydney press in 1953, a Mr. W.B. Wilson of Cremorne

Point, NSW, wrote that 36 years before, he had been prospecting on the main dividing range west of Katoomba. On climbing a small hill one day, which was covered with granite boulders, he found himself confronted with what he took to be a full-grown female lion emerging from the mouth of a cave.

As soon as it disappeared, Mr. Wilson climbed to the mouth of the cave and entered it to see if there were any more of the creatures there. He then followed the tracks of the strange animal into a rocky scrub and tree-covered area but failed to find any further trace of it.

About two years following this experience, he said another animal resembling a lion was seen by four men and some schoolchildren as it emerged from the bush and crossed an open space leading to a pond, where it proceeded to drink before it once again returned to the bush. This incident at Sodwalls, was not the only such experience among the locals.

Mr. Wilson recalled how around Sodwalls, children used to be kept at home from school whenever the animal was reported in the vicinity.

In those times it was generally agreed among bushwalking circles that there existed a small pack of these animals, and that their lair was situated somewhere between Breakfast Creek, Mouin Creek, and Cox's River. Prior to 1934, this region was described on maps as the Wild Dog Mountains and there are a number of reports of these big shaggy-haired creatures having been encountered thereabouts.

During February 1959, a railway workman, Mr. Alec

Donaldson, was working on electricity lines in deep scrub in the vicinity of Clarence on the western side of the Blue Mountains near Lithgow.

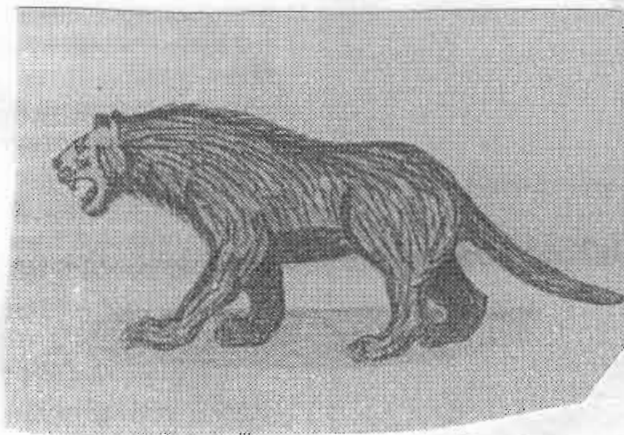
Rain the night before had made the ground damp, and on the soft mud of a track, Mr. Donaldson came upon several fresh pad marks of some huge cat-like beast, measuring a good 15cm in width. Needless to say, Alec Donaldson decided not to stay very long after his discovery and could never be persuaded to return there ever again.

Old-timers of the Clarence district say such large tracks have been seen thereabouts in the dense forest land for generations.

These 'lion' footprints have been photographed and casts exist of some of them. They compare with other found by me in a cave at Medlow Bath west of Katoomba in 1978. These tracks were a few days old when found but I was able to produce one plaster cast of the best surviving print. It measures 17cm in width by 15cm in length, and is different to a plaster cast of the notorious 'Australian Panther', found that year in the Cambewarra Range district in southern New South Wales.

But what exactly are these "Blue Mountain Lions"?

I would suggest that these 'monster-cats' are a population of some as yet unknown species of giant marsupial cat that has survived since the close of the last ice-age over 12,000 years



ago.

This intriguing possibility must be given favourable consideration in the light of palaeontological discoveries in recent years, of fossil remains of more than one, hitherto unknown species of ancient marsupial carnivore. These resemble the extinct Marsupial Lion (*Thylacoleo carnifex*) which roamed Australia in Ice-age times.

Be this as it may, there is certainly more than enough room for them to hide in the vast Blue Mountains ranges, emerging from time to time onto outlying farms and towns.

Such an animal was reported seen in 1972 in the Mulgoa district south of Penrith, near the Blue Mountains eastern escarpment, killing sheep, and on another occasion an enormous big-toothed, lion-like beast was said to have approached three young shooters in the same area in 1977. They fired at the creature but it escaped into dense scrub.

Sightings of these lion-like animals persist to this day around the Blue Mountains, especially in the Megalong Valley below Blackheath, into the adjoining Cedar Valley/Jameison Valley south of Katoomba, into Kedumba Valley to the south of Mount Solitary, around the backwaters of the Warragamba Dam and the southern side of the Burratorang Valley, now largely flooded by the Warragamba Dam backwaters.

Actually, the decline in 'lion' reports on the lower Blue Mountains after the mid-1950's was probably due to the gradual flooding of Burratorang Valley, following construction of the Warragamba dam, which would have restricted the movements thereabouts of these creatures. This has however, led to an increase in sightings around the western side of the backwaters into the Jenolan Range/Cedar and Megalong Valleys.

In August 1970, I explored the Red Dog Ridge area behind Mount Solitary with ranger Brian Hastings for evidence of 'lion' activity. The Ridge is another landmark which acquired its name from the frequency of Warrigal sightings in the past.

For example: in October 1937, a group of bushwalkers found on White Dog Ridge the decaying body of a huge animal about 1.2m in length which had apparently fallen over a cliff known as Kelpie Rocks. Ten days after this find was reported, Mr. Eric B. Gilmer of Ashbury, NSW, set out with three other bushwalkers in an effort to photograph the remains, but found nothing.

Instead they came across large tracks which they followed for about 500 yards in the direction of Mouin Creek, where they petered out.

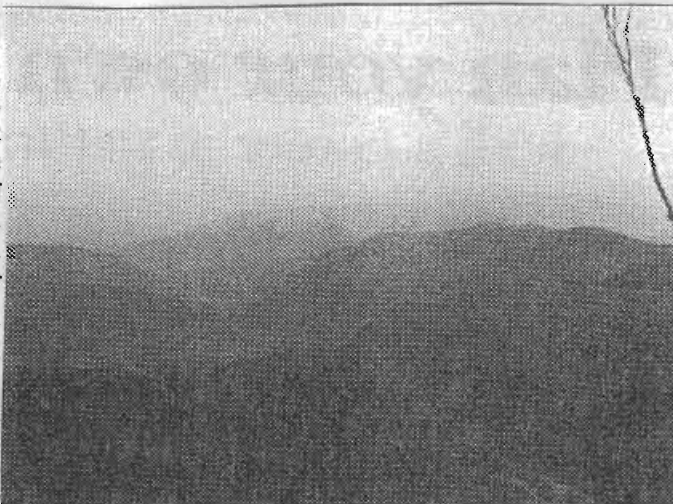
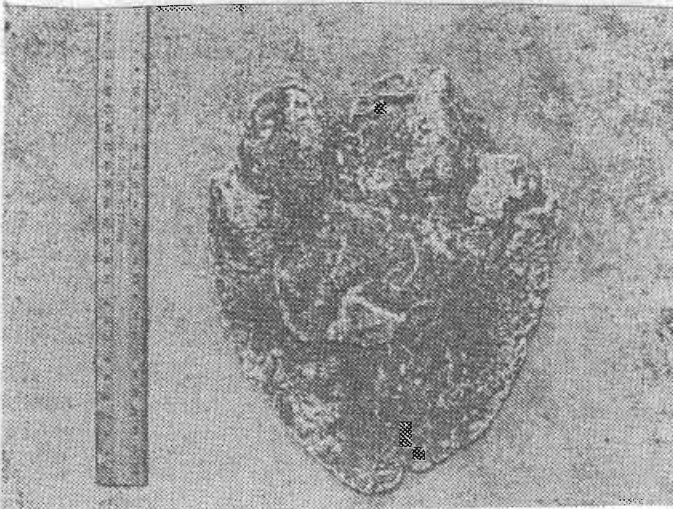
Another bushwalking party in April 1945, descending the Korrowal Buttress of Mount Solitary, must have been astonished as they watched through the binoculars four of these lion-like Warrigals loping across Cedar Valley. Cattle roam half wild around the scrubland south of the Jamieson Valley farm, and also around the remoter outlying regions of the Megalong Valley, just as they have done for many years past. On two occasions in 1949, three months apart, Mr. L. A. Adams found the freshly killed and mutilated bodies of calves on the Cox's River near Konangaroo Clearing.

A number of these wild cattle were found killed and mutilated in the Jameison and Megalong Valleys that year by campers, and for some months most bushwalking groups avoided this area until the killing and sightings died off.

Even in recent times, many people in the Mouin Creek area have heard weird howling and wailing noises believed made by these animals. The same sounds have been reported on and off over the past 14 years in the areas around the lower Blue Mountains, near Springwood, indicating perhaps some of these animals have survived east of the Warragamba Dam backwaters. During 1970 there were a number of reported sightings of "Warrigals" in the Kings Tableland area south of Wentworth Falls.

Lion-like animals still persist in the Mulgoa district. Not long after one of these monster cats was seen killing sheep on a property in the early 1970's, a farmer shot what may have been a young, tomcat-sized animal of the 'lion' description. He presented the dead animal to scientists at Sydney University. Yet, despite the totally different body structure and protruding teeth of the animal, these 'experts' brushed it aside as merely "a deformed domestic cat"! Such "scientific" explanations as this do not hold water.

Back in 1972, two teenagers, Ron Briggs and Rod Coffee, were riding pushbikes out on Lawson View Road, Wentworth Falls, when a huge shaggy-haired 'mountain lion', at least 1.6m in length, and standing approx 1m high, bounded across the



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## MYSTERY LIONS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

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road in front of them. The dark brown furred animal disappeared into the dense scrub.

Ron's brother, Phillip, in 1982, had a similar experience when he saw the same type of creature while bike riding out on Tablelands Road, Wentworth Falls.

According to old Aboriginal traditions of the former Burraborang and Megalong Valley tribes, the eerie "Devils Hole", the great cleft in the cliffs out on Katoomba's Cliff Drive, which drops down into the Megalong Valley below Narrow Neck Peninsula, was once the lair of the 'rock-dogs', or Warrigals, - huge shaggy-haired animals that used to attack Aborigines. Needless to say, Aborigines avoided the "Hole" as much as possible. They said it was up this cleft that the 'rock dogs' were able to move from out of the valley up into the Katoomba scrub. Perhaps they still do.

Several years ago, outlying farms and

houses bordering the Katoomba water catchment scrub were terrorised by mysterious huge, hairy lion-like animals. They killed poultry, mauled cattle, and left behind large tracks in the soil.

At the time I was deluged with sightings reports of the monster cats, but after a few weeks they faded away as mysteriously as they had happened.

The "Blue Mountains Lion" mystery persists. Only in January this year (1992) several campers on the Wild Dog Mountains south-west of Narrow Neck Peninsula claimed they saw a large, brownish-haired, lion-like cat, in the act of sunning itself on a cliff edge. When it saw the campers it rose up and bounded off in big strides up and over boulders and down into a gully to disappear, leaving the group a little uneasy after this experience.

In another incident, in February this year, a man and woman were hiking below Devils Hole, when they stopped to

rest prior to climbing up the 'Hole' to the Cliff Drive. The time was about 4pm and as they sat on a trackside rock, they were startled by a loud roaring noise coming from a nearby gully.

"Whatever it was, it sounded frightening, and we got out of that place and up the Devils Hole as quick as we could", said the man to me later.

The vast rugged impenetrable valleys of the Blue Mountains remain much as they have for untold thousands of years. There are still regions out there where modern man has yet to penetrate.

Who is to say what creatures could survive unseen out there?

Until one of these animals can be captured, or the remains of one found, the identity of the "Blue Mountains Lion" remains unestablished.

And so these hairy, lion-like animals live on - eluding Man - and the vast wilds of the Blue Mountains continue to keep their secret.